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re:collection

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By

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THESIS

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Angela Kelly, Committee Chair	Date
Dan Larkin, Committee Advisor	Date
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LIST OF FIGURES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores preservation and obsolescence in relation to memory and the family photograph. Through a variety of erasure processes applied to discarded vernacular imagery and projections, the artist manipulated the content, framing and perspective of alleged family memories. The specific techniques utilized include digital erasure, removal by cutting implements, targeted bleaching and the re-photographing of projected Kodachromes into selective fragments. This process facilitated the investigation of the relationship between family photographs, formation of individual memory and the life cycle of family narrative. This work raises questions about the normative sociological factors at play in memory preservation and the constructed family narrative as reflected in the vernacular photograph.

INTRODUCTION

"Living does not easily organize itself into a continuous narrative."[1]
James Clifford

The inspiration for my thesis work was a dusty box of remnants and photos from decades ago. Amongst the dirt in the box lay a wedding album, its pages askew, filled with discolored photos, their edges crumpled and torn. I am referring to my parents wedding album. It is the only photographic evidence that they were ever a couple. The off-white cover shows its age. The rest of the photos in the box were of my brother Tim and me and the "celebrations" or everyday occurrences of the life we lived. While some other families have elaborate scrapbooks and detailed photo albums complete with names, dates and times, my family photos have no chronology. Instead I inherited piles of scattered envelopes, covered with dust (which may or may not be a common occurrence in the lives of others).

Growing up without a tangible family album might explain my attraction to the idea of working with family snapshots. While I do have the printed pictures, retrieved from assorted envelopes and boxes without covers, I do not have a chronological visual record of my life to reflect upon; just bits and pieces, fragments of memory amongst the dust. (Dust later becomes a larger part of what makes up my thesis work, "re:collection.")

This work is the product of answering questions concerning memory and family photographs. The work began as I investigated the photographs of my own family and progressed through the manipulation and appropriation of the discarded traces of unknown family origin, specifically in the form of my own collection of discarded Kodachromes from the 1950's.

1 Clifford, James. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1986. Page 106.

The task of establishing a narrative in my own box of photographs was daunting, there was no writing on the back of the photos whatsoever only an occasional date stamp. Upon interrogation I found that the memories of others were as unreliable as my own. In my photographs there was always a point of recognition, whether it was the wallpaper in the background, the yard of the first house I lived in on Catherine Court, or a handmade quilt covering the back of a couch. I found myself recognizing the details in the setting of the photograph rather than the ostensible event or occasion that was occurring.

In forming my thesis, I focused on the questions: Do I remember the actual event or moment of a photograph from the past or does the photograph stand in for the memory? Do I see other people's family photographs when I look at them or do I just get taken back to a similar photo of my own?

In this thesis, my interest focuses on the reconstruction of imagery from the appropriated family photograph and representing it in a new yet familiar installation experience for the viewer. The images are made to speak to the idea of memory and or loss of memory in regard to family photographs.

CHAPTER 1
CONCEPTUALIZATION

I have always been interested in the found object. I obtained my first found/discarded slides at a Salvation Army thrift store in Rockland, Maine in 2004. Garage sales and thrift stores have been an integral part of my adult life. This has involved picking up notes, drawn pictures and written blurbs off of the ground or from inside books, stuck in bushes or blowing from one side of the street to the next. I have found notes and photos in the oddest of places, it is like a perpetual Easter egg hunt. As an artist, I have always enjoyed the mundane, the everyday, and the ephemera other people ignore such as the things taken for granted, neglected, and/or thrown away. Discarded photographs and slides simultaneously belong to anyone and to no one at all. Sometimes the found objects are immediately transformed or repurposed into something else, while other times they remain dormant until further exploration.

I delight in the challenge of working with anonymity. I can imagine creating work that is a Choose Your Own Adventure book in which "each story is written from a second-person point of view, with the reader assuming the role of the protagonist and making choices that determine the main character's actions in response to the plot and its outcome."[2] There is no certain empirical history with the discarded object and only inference prevails. Effectively, found photography lacks authorship until it is transformed into something new. With new contexts and juxtapositions, a new author is identified.

During the first quarter of my graduate studies at RIT, I began a visual study that, unbeknownst to me, would end up developing into the work contained in my thesis. I began by searching for meaning in the anonymous slide collection I had in my possession. One evening I took out my old slide projector and a metal case of Kodachromes that I had purchased at a thrift store in Maine years before. I did not fill

2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choose_Your_Own_Adventure. 2009.

up the slide box on the projector, instead I chose to drop them into rotation one at a time. Without an actual projection screen, I opted to use a piece of white foam core to serve as the screen. The first projected image was of a nondescript street scene. The colors were amazing, yet subtle. The slide was from the mid-fifties. The dust was clearly evident in the projection. Instinctively, I grabbed my camera and photographed the projected image. I photographed that same slide from different angles and started moving the foam core around to get only a sliver of detail in focus. I shot a few more slides that night and then went back to work on a different series. My mind kept wandering back to the new images I had made from the old. I was taken back to this statement by Barthes, which put words to my experience: "Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes despite its clarity, the punctum should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it."[3] I instantaneously understood: the punctum reveals itself post hoc, as a function of memory.

From this initial round of slide shooting, I started a body of work and called it "other people's lives." Coincidentally this is also the title of a 1997 song by Modest Mouse that includes the lyrics "other people's lives seem more interesting cuz they ain't mine." The title did not come from the song but I found that the lyrics made sense in how I was thinking about the work at that time.

As I looked through the camera lens that first night, I contemplated all of the different ways one could view the single image. The slides were mostly of the tourist or vacationer type. Most were street scenes with people walking amid the facades of buildings. No one looked in the direction of the camera, and I focused mostly on the backs of people walking away or side-views of people who were crossing the street. I was interested in trying to change the perspective of the person who had been behind the camera well after the moment had passed.

3 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York : Hill and Wang, 1981. Page 53.

Figure 1.1. *Untitled*. 2006.

From the first view through the fifth view, there is a slight shift in viewing perspective through the camera. My emerging idea during this investigation was that no two people, be they strangers or lovers, can simultaneously share the exact same experience or memory.

I met with my committee member, Alex Miokovic, and he recommended that I read The Tourist Gaze by John Urry. Included in the book were references from several authors I had already been reading such as Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and John Berger. The book spoke about photography as a means of transcribing reality, and

noted that the images produced were not statements about the world, but pieces *of* it. Photographs do not necessarily transcribe reality, but perhaps transcribe the world as it was seen and recorded at certain moments in time. Hence, photographs represent what an individual sees, subjectively, a statement from the photographer. One of the important terms Urry introduces is "Kodakisation." Urry discusses the book *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* by Nancy Martha West and how Kodak had taught people how to "see, remember and love."[4]

The images portrayed in Kodak advertisements from the 1950's were simulated family snapshots, which were meant to serve as proof of reality. "Part of what makes Kodak advertising after 1901 so powerful is its incorporation of snapshots that seem completely 'authentic.' As we look at them we forget that most were taken by professional rather than amateur photographers, with models rather than housewives."[5] All of the family snapshots in the advertisements that I saw were of typical, white, blissful nuclear families. The result of that inquiry was a decision to discontinue further exploration related to the tourist slides.

Figure 1.2 Kodak Advertisement. copyright. Eastman Kodak Company. 1950.

Since I found myself unable to relate to the construct of the white, blissful nuclear family, I became interested in working with the imagery of everyday family

4 West, Nancy Martha. *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. University Press of Virginia: Charlottesville and London. 2000. Pg. xv.
5 Ibid. Page 205.

occurrences. I began thinking more in depth about my own family's history. This investigation included looking at pictures and considering the ideas of what constitutes "family." In the 3rd quarter of my first year in graduate school I enrolled in the class "Beyond the Family Album" taught by Angela Kelly. The class was an insightful resource (both visual and written). The readings not only inspired me to investigate my own ideas pertaining to family and memory, but also contributed to the birth of "re:collection" and informed the visual work itself. I was introduced to artists such as Lori Novak and Jo Spence and the writings of Marianne Hirsch. I found the visual and theoretically based work of Jo Spence compelling and informative. Her ideas pertaining to how people interact with and are "informed" by family snapshots were influential in the early stages of my work. I began to scrutinize how I learned about some of the events pictured in my own snapshots. In the words of Jo Spence, "but how can this happen when, from the moment we can hold a book and nod in the direction of small rectangles of coloured paper, we continue to be encouraged to believe that all the complexities of the submerged world of family life can be encapsulated in snapshots, that such pictures 'mean' what we are told they mean, that we are who we are told we are."[6]

The display of the family snapshot in the home has been a fascination of mine for years. I often remember going into the homes of family members and looking around the surrounding mantles, bookshelves and walls for a photo of me, and ending up being surprised (every time) when there was not one to be found. This resulted in the feeling of invisibility. Was I never around when the pictures were being taken? For at that young age I was not behind the camera or anywhere to be found.

Family photographs have been seen as evidential and truthful and stand in as a representation of a person. For example, when a photo of a person is shared, the words this is my brother, rather than, this is a photo of my brother are used. "Family photos are significant objects in houses. They are paid attention, and what is seen in them

6 Spence, Jo. *Putting myself in the picture : a political, personal and photographic autobiography*. London : Camden, 1986. Pg. 213.

is their referent."[7] I was not a referent so did this mark my existence? My mortality seemed well defined. I could never reach immortality if there was no tangible evidence of my existence on the walls in the homes of others. I have often wondered whether this absence of any physical picture of me on display may have erased my existence, at least to the familial others. It was brought to my attention at least a handful of times in my late 20's and early 30's that family acquaintances did not know of my existence. The words I heard were "I didn't know Tim had a sister." And while my physical co-presence should have been convincing enough, it was not. I reflect back and wonder whether they were peering over my shoulder at the wall in an attempt to prove that I did not exist in display form. I am in a photograph on a wall, therefore I am.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes states, "This fatality (no photograph without something or someone) involves Photography in the vast disorder of objects – of all the objects in the world: why choose (why photograph) this object, this moment, rather than some other? ... Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see."[8] When I look at the old snapshots of my life that I am present in, I often look through them to try to recall what the photograph represents. What was really happening at the time of the exposure? If I am smiling, was it forced through the word "smile," or was it a natural response? Then again, is there such a thing as a natural response after being trained to "smile" for the camera? This training was reinforced by whoever was behind the camera. I often remember hearing "you look a lot better when you smile." I dreaded those words. Is anyone ever who he or she really is in front of a lens? "A photograph is a representation, an abstraction of the real world rather than a re-creation of it."[9]

7 Rose, Gillian. Family Photographs and Domestic Spacings: A Case Study. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, *New Series*, Vol. 28, No. 1. Pg. 11.
8 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York : Hill and Wang, 1981. Pg. 6.
9 Hall-Duncan, Nancy..*Photographic Truth*. The Bruce Museum. Greenwich, CT. 1988. Pg. 7.

These questions led me to conceptualize the photograph as standing in for the memory that was no longer remembered. I began trying to flesh out what was to later become one of the main ideas of my thesis. I took some of my own family snapshots from that dusty box and began working with them. The snapshots I chose to work with were from my childhood, because I did not have any memory of that time or event represented in the photograph. Once scanned in, I used Adobe Photoshop to remove myself from the images with the selection tool and the delete button. The backs of the photographs were scanned and were able to be seen in the place of the selected erasure.

Figure 1.3 *Untitled 1978*. 2007.

I was reading Marianne Hirsch's book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* at the time. One of the main topics in the book is the dilemma that the photograph poses in its capacity to both reveal and conceal in regard to family relations. In a way, it seems as though we live through pictures as we live through breathing. There is no other record of existence like a photograph, even if it is contrived. When looking back at a photograph, it indeed stands in for the memory.

"Our memory is never fully ours, nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past. We both construct a fantastic past and set out on a detective trail to find other versions of the real one."[10] The photograph was the memory. I had no real memory of the pictured events, but I did remember the teddy bear with the jingles in her ears, the garage I was standing in front of and the owl macramé hanging. I don't remember ever being particularly close with my brother Tim at all but one would think we were close because of the poses in the pictures. Is it just the nostalgia or the superficial remembering evoked by the image that makes me believe that I remember that moment? Nostalgia in this sense is about evoking emotions that appear to come from happy memories in the photograph. Nostalgia is the embodiment of a past made familiar. "Familiarity always arises where we confront our own memories and fantasies and recognize ourselves in this or that situation."[11]

Beyond Marianne Hirsch, I read more about erasure and deconstructivist works such as Robert Rauschenberg's "Erased de Kooning drawing," and about the idea of the palimpsest.[12] I recognized this as an apparent visual aspect of my work with my family snapshots, where I worked with a sort of additive subtraction. I looked at the work of Richard Galpin, who cuts and peels away photographs of buildings and architecture with a scalpel, which motivated me to purchase some scalpels. I wanted to put his specific technique to use in my work by removing visual forms from photographs with a scalpel.

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10 Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: photography, narrative and postmemory*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA. 1997. Pg. 14.

11 Tsiaras, Philip. *Family Album*. Roma : Contrasto, 2002. Pg. 3.

12 http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/palimpsest defines palimpsest as; a manuscript, typically of papyrus or parchment, that has been written on more than once, with the earlier writing incompletely erased and often legible, or an object, place, or area that reflects its history. In my case I am referring to it in the blurring or erasure of the re-imagined photograph.

Figure 1.4 *Untitled Three Ladies*. Unkknown. 2007.

Out of all the Kodachromes I had sorted through, there was one that I kept returning to consistently and repeatedly. I began printing out the whole frame of the 35mm found family slide of the Three Ladies. The single slide of these three ladies hovering over a newborn stayed on my mind for months. The wall is a pond blue color with a heavy gold frame that hangs above their heads. Two of the women are seated on the couch holding the baby between them, while the third lady stands close in front of them, creating a circle of hands around the little one.

Erasure is never merely a matter of making things disappear. There is always something left behind, whether it is a scratch, a rubbed eraser blemish or what is left outside of the frame. In a documented talk between John Baldessari and Christian Boltanski concerning erasure, Baldessari said, "It makes me wonder what is more important, because memory erases. Sometimes I think what is erased is the more important thing to retrieve than the thing that's remembered."[13] What is erased is not retrievable, which creates an anxiety for the viewer. I agreed with his line of thinking and

13 John Baldessari, Christian Boltanski: "What Is Erased" (A conversation between John Baldessari and Christian Boltanski), *Blind Spot Photography*, Issue Three, 1994.

started to ponder the idea of representing an erased memory as fragmented.

With my acquired scalpels I began to remove each lady from the image, leaving the infant and everything else still in the frame. I was interested in the idea of memory and loss, which manifested in physically removing people from the images. I was not at all interested in the results of the cutting and slicing. After sharing these pieces with my committee, Angela Kelly suggested I consider using bleach.

Clorox bleach was purchased and applied to both inkjet prints and Lambda C-41 process prints. I painted varnish on the areas of the print that I wanted to remain unbleached. The bleaching process on inkjet prints was a failure as the bleach did not affect that type of print. On the C-41 process and Lambda prints the result looked explosive and violent, like Napalm. Researching during this process, I found the work of Curtis Mann, which was extremely similar, if not the same visually as my work. I decided to move on.

Figure 1.5 Curtis Mann. *Easter,* 2006

Figure 1.6 *Untitled Bleach*. 2008.

After recovering from the bleach episodes, I was still engrossed in the ideas of memory, loss and the passage of time. I thought about the found photograph having lost its connection to the person originally pictured in it and to the person who "owned" it as well. I scanned in a photograph from the 50's of a boy in a suit and tie. I then crumpled it in my hand and rescanned it in again after. This process was repeated four times. More than anything else, I was drawn to the scratches and faded edges.

Figure 1.7 *Untitled Time*. 2008.

The end result was a forced progression of time and also read as violent or aggressive. The physical act of crumpling a photograph that wasn't mine to begin with felt wrong, mischievous and almost illegal.

Figure 1.8 *Untitled Time*. Detail. 2008.

Kristen Wilkins collects found photographs and removes the subjects' faces in Photoshop. I really enjoyed viewing her work, and her images with the erased faces are eerie, but using Photoshop seemed too easy to me. This work brought me back

to photographing my slide collection. In another committee meeting, Angela Kelly asked me to "free" write about each image that I had photographed. During this process I realized that the images that I had been drawn to had revealed something personal to me.

At one point, the work suggested the idea of "home," whether found or constructed. I have always been looking for home ever since I left my birth town in the 1990's. I met with committee member, Jessica Lieberman, and together we reflected on my sketchbook of images paired with writing. The image of the man's hands holding the cigarette and my accompanying writing stuck out to us both.

"this may be how i remember you.
hand holding cigarette,
though you haven't smoked in years.
we have rare amounts of pictures together.
maybe less than the fingers on one hand.
they were just postures for a lens.
none of it was real.
so I will remember you smoking.
hand holding a cigarette
though you haven't smoked in years."

Figure 1.9 *Untitled Father*. 2008.

The writings prompted me to consider my connection to the slide of the Three Ladies. That particular image reminded me of my three godparents, two of whom allegedly didn't realize they were, until I showed them an old Polaroid that identified them as such. Was that the reason I was attracted to this image? Was I projecting my experience onto the found slide and constructing a more favorable memory through it?

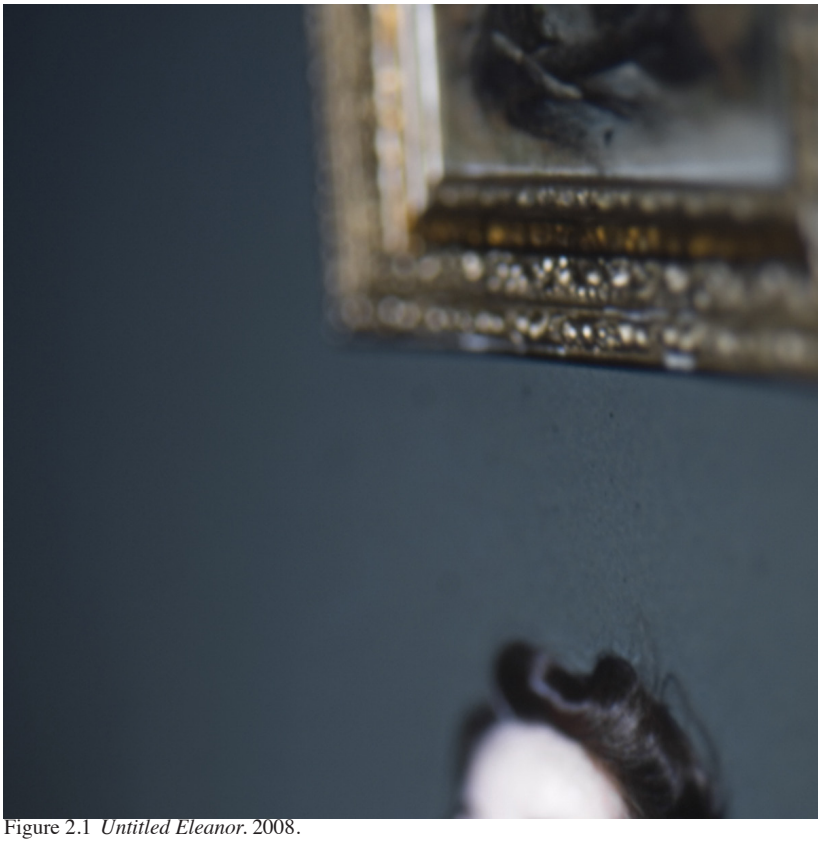

Figure 2.1 *Untitled Eleanor.* 2008.

I named the woman wearing the green dress "Eleanor," and found that when I re-photographed just the tip of her head and the edge of the frame, a different experience was created. Something poignant resided in that single fragment. Each different fragment created from that slide was a different perspective, a new un-recovered memory. That single slide was re-photographed repeatedly, until eventually, it could no longer be found. I was a bit torn, almost shattered when I lost it. I tore apart my

apartment looking for it, and retraced my steps at school but Eleanor and the ladies were nowhere to be located. I wondered whether someone would find it, and whether they would be as interested in it as I had become. Would the slide have the same impact on their world as it had on mine or would it end up in the trash?

The re-photographed images became my work through the act of appropriation. All of the images I selected to re-imagine and re-present had awakened a personal memory for me, even though the memories in the images were not mine. Most of the images reminded me of my own snapshots. Since this was my experience, I was certain others could relate to the work in a similar way. At the very core of the images is absence, absence of the past, absence of a provenance, absence of an owner, absence of a single life story or a complete family history. The event that occurred in the original Kodachrome no longer exists, and while the photograph remains, its original context does not. The re-photographing of each fragment further pushed the idea of absence.

My intent was for this final representation of absence to speak about the limitations of the family photograph as a medium of memory.

CHAPTER 2
MEANING. INFLUENCES. HISTORY.

"I am sometimes asked "What is your objective? And this I cannot truthfully answer. I work "from" something rather than towards something. It is a process of discovery."[14]

Bridget Riley

Reading this quote made my heart beat just a little faster. I thought to myself, here's an artist with a working method I could relate to. In her lecture on the nature of art titled *Painting Now*, Riley stated, "An artist is someone with a text which he or she wants to decipher." Sometimes I have an idea firmly sketched out in my head and my sketchbook. Other times, I work intuitively. The basis for my thesis work started with someone else's dusty Kodachromes, which I bought, brought home, and stored for years before I used them as a resource for my art. The more I sorted, projected and photographed these slides, the more I recognized their value as an essential resource worth exploring.

One question I have been asked by various people over the past couple of years is "why work with the discarded slides?" I have found that these amateur snapshots (though in the form of chrome slides) are endless gems. I have amassed an incredible amount of prefabricated materials to examine, critique and utilize in my art. At some point these particular discarded moments were probably important to someone, but with a new owner the sense of loss is embedded in the objects. "The snapping of the picture was a way of declaring: You are important, you matter to me, this moment was significant and we should remember it."[15] This progression from being important and photographed into being discarded and forgotten serves as a reminder of time passing and forgetting, reinforcing the idea of the fragility of life.

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14 Stiles, Kristine. *Theories and documents of contemporary art : a sourcebook of artists' writings*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1996. Pg. 112.

15 Poyner, Rick. True Stories. *Print* 60 no2. Mr/Ap 2006.

Another artist working with found or discarded snapshots is Joachim Schmid, who vowed to never take another picture. His dogma is "No new photographs until all the old ones have been used up."[16] He does not manipulate or re-photograph the image, but displays the actual found snapshot, Polaroid or photo-booth strip on a sheet of paper pinned to a wall. He takes something that was thrown away and brings attention to the temporality of the photograph as well as the underlying notion of mortality. Every time I go back to his work, which is often, there is something new for me to engage with, whether I am focusing on the detail of a tire tread on the image or even the texture of the ripped up photograph that has been reassembled by Schmid.

I forget more than I remember and the photograph is stronger than memory. The act of remembering the event or memory of a photograph is a part of my own experience. What happens when I take away the main aspect of the picture or pose, fragmenting it into mere detail? Does it still bring about the memory of what was originally in the frame? Remembering and forgetting are both significant issues that people, as fallible human beings, deal with sometimes on a daily basis. It does not suffice to profess which is a more difficult task, remembering or forgetting. In the film "Waking Life," one of the characters has an interesting view on this subject. "Before you drift off, don't forget. Which is to say, remember. Because remembering is so much more a psychotic activity than forgetting."[17] Remembering and forgetting seem to be activities somewhat beyond an individual's control, and the photograph only seems to exacerbate the process.

"re:collection" plays with the way the family snapshot has been viewed for the past decades especially in relation to memory and the photograph. "Photographs are not subject to memory recollection and a person's portrayal of events can be quite different from what appears in the photographs."[18] Physical photographs, unlike the

16 Weber, John S. *Joachim Schmid: Photoworks 1982-2007*. Göttingen : Steidl ; [London : Thames & Hudson [distributor]], 2007. Pg. 71..
17 *Waking Life*. Director Bob Sabiston. Writer Richard Linklater. 20th Century Fox. 2002.
18 Kaslow, Florence. (Summer, 1979). "What Personal Photos Reveal About Marital Sex Conflicts." *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 5: pp. 134-141.

actual memory, stay nearly identical over time, minus the physical decay from being displayed in light or the changing edges from being bent in a storage box.

The fact that photographs at one time were considered to be evidence of truth, a document of the way things were, and an intimate peek into the minutiae of someone's life, is critical to my work. Artist Christian Boltanski, in an interview with Delphine Rendard, states, "In most of my photographic pieces I have manipulated the quality of evidence that people assign to photography, in order to subvert it, or to show that photography lies – that what it conveys is not reality but a set of cultural codes."[19] By literally changing the focal plane of the image, I have changed the intended meaning. Whether the detail is of a collectible figurine, a religious symbol or a framed picture on the wall in the background, what was previously happening in the picture frame is transformed into a new view of the past. Through this gesture, I undermine the power and authority of the established system inherent in the viewing of the family snapshot. By fragmenting the expected image in the context of the family frame, I toy with what people might expect to remember in terms of a certain event, occasion or even the details of a room.

When I think about my family snapshots, I rarely remember the event portrayed in the image. What I do remember are the poignant times, the fights, and perpetual groundings where I would be required to stay in the house for months without outside free time or use of the telephone. I have the visual memory for which there is no photograph of my stepmother Helen dying for days in the hospital, the color-caste of the room, the auditory hallucinogenic classical music that served as her final soundtrack. I have no photographs of any of these times or memories. Why do we take only conventionally posed images? People still want to/are trained in some way to project/remember the "good times," even if in reality those good times never existed. They pretend. What is the point? In the end a photograph is only from one person's perspective. "The camera does not simply record an event but also records what the

19 Gumpert, Lynn. Christian Boltanski. Flammarion. France. 1994, 176.

photographer chooses to see. Photographs are a statement about one's perception of the world."[20] Photographs are also the photographer's way of controlling everyone else's memory of an event or time period, and of causing others to share the shown perspective. Yet, people have continued to take the normative family pictures with the smiles (whether real or not) and the supposed happy times. "Family pictures say more about family romances than about actual details of family life."[21]

(See Appendix A).

But contemporary family snapshots are so laden with specific poses and gestures such as looking directly into the lens of the camera, the hand of a man on the shoulder of a woman (or vice versa), people getting close together with arms around each other, and a lot of smiling. Hirsch outlines the social functions of photography in relation to the family photo:

- Displays the cohesion of the family.
- Instrument of its togetherness.
- Chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals.
- Gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real, a trace touched directly by the event it records.
- Perpetuates familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history.
- Sustains an imaginary cohesion, even as it exacerbates them by creating images that real families cannot uphold.[22]

20 Williams, Charles. The Meaning of Family Photographs. "Studying the Home Mode: An exploration of Family Photography and Visual Communication," *Studies in Visual Communication,* v6, n1, pp.23-42.
21 Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: photography, narrative and postmemory*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA. 1997. Pg. 119.
22 Ibid. Pg. 2.

Regardless of the functions of the family photo, as stated above, there is more than one recollection for a photograph. There are a number of individuals involved in telling the tale of the photograph, including the person or people in the photograph, any other observers of that moment, and anyone else who may think they know the story of that moment whether it was handed down or actually experienced. Another great source I discovered in the "Beyond the Family Album" class is from Carol Mavor who writes, "It is only after we have lived through cycles of our lives, in recollection, in photographs, that a narrative comes through. Afterward we tell narratives that may be partly true, but they are also narratives that must be fictionalized in order for us to make sense of our lives..."[23]

Why wouldn't the photograph perpetuate ideals for the family? The mere fact that Kodak staged photographs in their advertisements in order to sell the camera was key to Hirsch's points in regards to social function. Kodak solidified the concept of the ideal family and commodified memory at the same time. How can memory exist without evidence? What kind of evidence is contrivance? "Kodak has done more than any other single enterprise or individual to determine the uses and expectations for snapshot photography, thereby also reshaping perceptions of such abstract concepts of memory and evidence."[24]

23 Mavor, Carol. *Becoming : the photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden*. Durham [N.C.] : Duke University Press, 1999.
24 West, Nancy Martha. *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. University Press of Virginia: Charlottesville and London. 2000. Pg. xii..

FOUND. KODACHROME. THE 1950's. FAMILY.

Because I was working with found objects without a provenance, there is research to be done about the material I am using as well as the era that produced the Kodachrome slides I am re-visualizing. What was life generally like in the 50's? I was fascinated by the Technicolor-like pictures and the occurrences contained within them; the people, the vivid color, the places traveled, the family scenes, and the way things looked. There are stories inside the frame but the details are unclear. The time period of these images represents several decades before my birth, and some of the details remind me of scenes I have viewed in photographs in the photo albums of my grandparents. The images were familiar even though I had no idea who the people were.

No matter the reasoning behind what I considered a loss (of ownership, of familial history or of relationship) these slides belonged to me now, but that ownership too is only temporary. No one will ever love them as much as me. Who will love them when I am gone? I needed and chose to work with this collection. I also added to my collection through searches on Internet sites such as Ebay and Craigslist using the search terms "vintage, Kodachrome, slides, 50's, family, collection."

(See APPENDIX B).

In the 50's, men and women were married at an early average age (around 20 respectively) and divorce was highly stigmatized and considered socially unacceptable. The idea of the "nuclear family" really sprouted in this era, also known (mythically) for familial bliss.[25] This was the era when women were expected to stay home and perform the duties of mother and homemaker (though during the war they may have been forced to work in a factory). *The Women's Guide to Better Living*, a popular book during the 50's advised "the family is the unity to which you most genuinely belong…The family is the center of your living. If it isn't, you've gone far astray."[26]

25 Kallen, Stuart A. The 1950's. Greenhaven Press; illustrated edition. 2000. Pg. 56.
26 Ibid.

Needless to say being a women in the 50's was equated with making a home, making children and taking care of it all.

Advertising and 50's consumerist sensibility pushed the consumption of photo equipment and the selling of memories. Many popular television shows of the 50's, such as Ozzie and Harriet and Leave It to Beaver, were the reiteration of the traditional American family. Members of families during that time endured repression especially if their structure was noticeably different from the neighbors or when dealing with alcoholism, homosexuality and/or abusive relations. Children and other family members had to "keep up appearances."[27] Because the idea of the family was central to the myth of American life perpetuated in the media, Kodak updated its drawing of "Kodak Girl" with a photograph of a 1950's woman who could have stepped out of a Norman Rockwell paining: she holds a camera, ready to take a snapshot of her husband, son and dog.[28] Kodak upheld and promoted the already ideal image of the 50's nuclear family along with the idea that the snapshot would be the memory, as referred to (instilling fear) in most of their advertisements. Kodak insisted that the photograph was far worthier than a person's memory. "Have your camera with you everywhere – for that's where great snapshots are…Wherever you are, wherever you go. Then you'll save all of those wonderful memories instead of wishing you had." In "re:collection," I am interested in revealing the incongruity in the thought process of thinking that a photograph is proof of something real.

27 Coons, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American families and the nostalgia trap*. New York, NY : BasicBooks, 1992. Page 33-35.

28 Greenough, Sarah. *The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888 – 1978: from the collection of Robert E. Jackson*. Washington [D.C.] : National Gallery of Art ; Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2007. Pg. 165.

PROCESS + REFRAMING.

After editing through many hours of projected slides, I was left with a pile of handpicked selections. My next step was to review those projections and select a reasonable number of choices with respect to the amount of frames I had acquired. The final slides were chosen with the events they purportedly represented in mind, and they included but were not limited to homecoming or prom-like events, weddings, family vacations, Christmas, photos of homes, and backyard picnics. The rest of the images selected were what I understandably called "photos of the everyday," or more quotidian events including dinners and other household situations. Each of the selections brought something personal to me in relation to my own historical events and memories (or lack thereof).

The second step after choosing which images I wanted to work with was to re-photograph those specific projections. In the single images, I shifted the focus onto something that was not initially intended to be the subject, like an obscure detail in the background or a sizeable piece of dust. In the beginning stages of my thesis work, I had retouched the images in Photoshop to rid some of the dirt and dust, but I realized that dust had become a metaphor for memory and the work itself. After discussions with my committee member Dan Larkin, I decided that in consideration of the passage of time and memory I left the dust and even used it as a focal point when re-photographing the slides. I read the recommended chapter entitled "Dust" from Celeste Olalquiaga's book *The Artificial Kingdom*. The chapter began with a quote from Walter Benjamin: "The grey film of dust covering things has become their best part."[29] The book itself was based on and inspired by Benjamin's article, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Olalquiaga writes, "Dust grants things a peculiarity that reconstitutes them as a new experience, validating instead of disqualifying them…Dust makes palpable the elusive passing of time…A messenger of death, dust is the signature of lost

29 Olalquiaga, Celeste. The Artificial Kingdom; On the Kitsch Experience. University Of Minnesota Press. 1992. Pg. 91,95.

time."[30] The dust on the Kodachromes was re-photographed into dust on the print, just as something old was being made into something new. The dust as well as any cracks, scratches or fading was important in the work as a stand in for the emotional implications of the mortality of an image or snapshot.

One of the images I chose to re-photograph is of a (hypothetically) heterosexual couple with another woman and an older man standing in front of a yellow flower garden. The two women stand close with their bodies more gestured towards each other. Next to them stand the husband and the older man, respectively.

Figure 2.2 *Untitled Original*. 2008.

When re-photographing, I chose to focus on just the two women standing close together in front of the flowers by themselves as if they were the couple being photographed. This could easily be seen as going against the construct of the family snapshot in regards to the 50's. The finished reframed image is a result of my own deconstructionist decision and intuition. The re-photographing also contributed to presenting further isolation from the moment or fragmented memory.

Figure 2.3 *Untitled Two Women*. 2008.

30 Olalquiaga, Celeste. *The Artificial Kingdom; On the Kitsch Experience*. University Of Minnesota Press. 1992. Pages 91, 95.

The reframing of the image is psychologically representative of thinking about the event from a different viewpoint. "The process of reframing (also sometimes called cognitive restructuring) has many applications. You can use it with yourself: 'How else can I think about this situation and what I'm doing in it? What other stories might I tell myself about it?' Looking at a troubling situation from a new angle often makes it easier to find an easier way to handle."[31] The re-imagining of the former image takes form through the reframing. In actuality two objects may have no relationship, but through photographing and reframing, a connection can be established.

The blur present in the fragmented images is not computer generated, but the result of in-camera and lens decisions. The blur is important to the work as a way to further convey the shift or passage of time in relation to memory. Blurring also resonates the idea of erasure as discussed in Chapter 1. Erasure in the form of blurring takes the form of concealing or obscuring the original image within itself rather than a straight removal. The fragmentation and blur in each framed image unites the collection. In "re:collection" the final images reframed on the wall are from quite a few different collections of slides from the 50's. When presented in the older family frames salon style, they form the representation of a single collection and work together.

31 http://www.sonoma.edu/users/d/daniels/cognitive-behavioral.html. 2010.

CHAPTER 3.

THESIS PROCESS + REALIZATION OF EXHIBITION/INSTALLATION

CREATING THE TITLE

The title of my thesis work came from a very short letter I wrote to myself in January 2009. "Dear 1953, it has been a long time since I have forgotten to remember you, for I do not recollect." It has never been unusual for me to write short letters during the day-to-day. Sometimes they are for an audience, and other times just for myself. The word recollect according to dictionary.com.

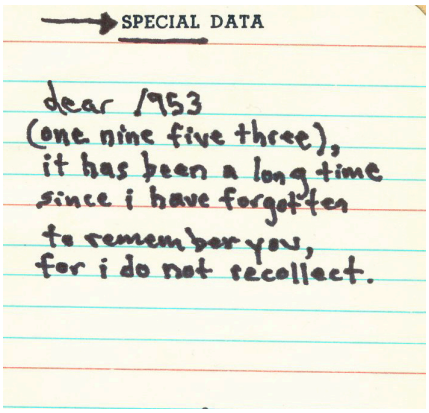

Figure 2.4 *Author Note*. 2008.

verb: (used with object)

to recall to mind; recover knowledge of by memory; remember

to have a recollection; remember

I was asked why I did not just spell it as "recollect", and why the inclusion of the colon? The answer – I wanted to reference, in shorthand, the subject or "re:" as well. "Re" is a preposition which stands for "about, concerning, regarding, with reference to." This work is also about or with reference to a collection, a memory (loss) collection.

Re:collection speaks not only to the idea of memory, but also to recovering knowledge and remembering. The photographs serve as the memory or what is recollected. Collection refers to a group of things or objects as well as an assemblage of works of art. I am working from my own collection of discarded slides. I am re-inventing an old collection into a new collection. In his article "The Meaning of Family Photographs", Charles Williams states that "photographs are not subject to memory recollection, and a person's portrayal of events can be quite different from what appears in the photograph."

THE SET.

Figure 2.5 *Studio 316 early*. 2009. Figure 2.6 *Scene from Synechdoche, New York*. 2008. copyright Charlie Kaufman, Likely Story. Figure 2.7 *Studio 316 later*. 2009.

The multi-layered structure of the movie "Synechdoche, New York" influenced my installation of "re:collection." Synecdoche is a noun, meaning, "a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for a part, the special for the general or the general for the special." Building only part of the family room instead of the whole room plays on this figure of speech. Entering the set "installs the viewer into an artificial system with an appeal to his/her subjective perception as its ultimate

goal." The protagonist in this film, Caden Cotard (played by Phillip Seymour Hoffman), is determined to create a play of brutal realism and honesty. At a significant point in the film, Caden states, "I am mounting a play that I think is going to be pure and truthful." He directs actors playing actors in a celebration of the mundane, instructing each to live out their constructed lives (sometimes with only a directive on a post-it note). It is a play-within-a-play, within a film, paralleling those early older Kodak advertisements where the family and the snapshot itself are on display. Being inspired by theater and the idea of a set allowed me to visualize the creation of an installation environment or "set" for my work rather than simply setting up an actual family room or living room the viewer would walk into. The inference of a home for the work was more interesting to me than a full construct, especially after seeing the setup in "Synechdoche, New York." There is a strong parallel between installation and theater with both playing to a viewer. I wanted to create a home for my thesis work. The images were not meant to be hung in a static white-walled gallery in new frames. The vintage frames were meant to evoke feelings of nostalgia and familiarity.

Home is both a physical space and a psychological space in which identity can be established. A home is what I created for "re:collection" in the old guitar workshop known as Studio 316. It was my intention to reference a sense of place in the family room of an actual home, without all of the knick-knacks and usual or normative details (that might have included newspapers or magazines, religious artifacts and a television). I wanted to reference the idea that objects (the photographed as well as the actual objects) connect to recollections unique to each individual. I structured other people's discarded "memories" into a new narrative opportunity with the construction of the "home" environment.

I painted a rectangle on the main wall 12 feet wide by 10 feet high. The color chosen was called "Pond." This color was inspired by the Kodachrome slide of the Three Ladies, since it was similar to the color of the wall in the image. A variation

of this color was used in the film “Synechdoche, New York” as well. I installed wood paneling across the 12-foot section of the Pond wall, which stood three feet in height. A square shag rug came out 10 feet from the back of the wall and held the set together. A golden brown couch, coffee table, end table and a lamp brought the environment together. Included on the back of the couch was a quilt my late grandmother stitched together using only old men’s pants from the 50’s and 60’s. The inclusion of the quilt and a doily, also made by my grandmother, solidified the space.

I made frequent trips to a multitude of thrift stores in the area in and surrounding Rochester. The frames were all hand picked with careful consideration. Each frame had to have a certain look to it and had to be older and in used but not destroyed condition. The 8x10 and 5x7 frames were easier to find than the diptychs and triptychs. The latter were few and hard to come by, hence the frequent trips. One vital piece to this installation was a larger multi-matted collage frame. I searched endlessly for many months. I finally found and purchased the 17x19 inch frame with 19 different photo openings and completed the installation.

The arrangement of my thesis work began with the selection of the framed single photographs that would be hung on the wall, the four diptychs for shelf display and table display, and two triptychs for the shelf. Initially, I had more frames in my possession than necessary for the space, 59 total. While in actuality I only used six combination frames (two triptychs and four diptychs) and 24 framed images on the wall (one of which contained 19 different views of the same image, two that contained four views of the same image and one that held two views of the same image).

Figure 2.8 *Untitled Mom/Son*. 2009.

After a great deal of research, including selected readings from David Halle's article *The Family Photograph*, I decided to use the salon style photograph display.

Figure 2.9 *The Den of a Manhattan House*.
David Halle. 1987.

Figure 3.1 *The Den of a Manhattan House Portrait*.
David Halle. 1987.

The above images served as inspiration for the presentation of "re:collection." I found a certain feeling of home while looking at the images of "The Den of a Manhattan House" from Halle's article that I wanted to utilize in the installation, even though the translation would be different. I liked the idea of the fireplace mantle holding framed pictures as it reminded me of my own childhood. I did not recreate a fireplace for "re:collection" but I did seek out and purchase mantle-like shelves to attach to the wall.

Figure 3.2 Partial wall from "re:collection." 2009.

With the salon style family room display, the eye is able to wander from one sliver of a memory or story to the next in an attempt to find connections that may or may not exist. I believe there is a fragment of recognition in the detail, something that sparks, or to reference Barthes, "punctures them and takes them back to their own family snapshots or memories." Would these details encourage a recollection of their own cherished photograph or of the actual memory?

I used three clamp lights to illuminate the installation, as well as the single-shaded lamp on the side table next to the couch. The table lamp was part of the set and not to necessary illuminate. The clamp lights were used to shine on the blue painted wall and the perimeters within the set, to reinforce the idea of the set. One light was aimed straight down from overhead as to light the table and carpeted area. None of the tube ceiling lights were turned on in the main room as to selectively light the installation.

I was curious as to how the viewer might respond. The set was inviting and semi-repelling at the same time. The shag carpet and couch were alluring, beckoning the viewer to remove their shoes, and even put up their feet on the table. I chose a selection of music from the late 1940's and 1950's to play softly during opening night to further enhance the experience of the play-like set. The volume was not overwhelming and served as background noise, to further reflect an actual family room.

I decided to forego a physical barricade around the immediate area of the installation in fear it would create a barrier beyond what was already inferred by the placement of the couch and the salon style photographs on the wall. One of the questions that came up in the studio in the week(s) before the opening was, "Do you want people to sit on the couch?" Originally, I was not sure what to expect of the viewers. I did not want to restrict the area, but did not want to welcome a seat on the couch, but creating a roped off museum-like environment was not an interest. The work needed to be accessible and experienced without distracting obstacles. Did I want the spectator walking into the family room area at all? I decided to leave it open-ended and have the viewer become the viewed as well. Once the viewer stepped onto the carpet and into the light, they had become part of the set by the viewers outside of the carpeted area. Part of my interest had become interwoven in how people would react and interact within the space.

My intent was for the viewer to enter the space with the possibility of recognition in the souvenirs or remnants of the past through the installation and the photographic fragments being framed objects themselves. The spaces of memory within each photograph and the display on the wall flowed from one image to the next with probability of construing a narrative or taking in each frame individually. I wanted the viewer to be engaged in a process of memory exploration implied in the installation as well as their own, specific experience. The question at the bottom of the posted artist statement outside of the door asked, "In your own experience with family snapshots, do you remember the actual event or does the photograph stand in for that memory?" Keeping this in mind before entering the installation space, my hope was that the functions of photography and photographs would be ruminated upon in regard to familial memory and memory in general.

Figure 3.3 Installation Shot. 2009.

The exhibition was open on May 8th from 6 p.m. through 9 p.m. The people in attendance had various interactions with the work throughout the evening. In the beginning people walked around the carpeted perimeter but as time passed, they walked up closer to the work stepping on the carpet. Toward the end of the evening people were sitting on the couch within the installation, framed photographs to their backs and shoes off. I did not interfere with their lounging or enjoyment and felt comfortable with their interaction with the set.

Nostalgia was discussed in relation to the framed fragments and traces of memory in the family photographs. This type of nostalgia refers to a contemplation of the past, not necessary regretful, but a spark, a punctum. The overall response was positive, with people interacting with the work and the environment, reminiscing of memories that were brought out by the installation and work contained within.

Overall, the show was received well, and questions of further work were asked, which conveniently brings this paper to a conclusion.

Figure 3.4 *Self Portrait*. "re:collection." 2009.

CONCLUSION.

The preparation for the exhibition was one of the most stressful and pleasurable times in my life thus far. Seeing something come together that I had worked on with patient determination was an accomplishment. That being said, the work is ongoing. Nothing is ever complete. There is much work left to do in making new pieces and watching it evolve and evolving with it. "re:collection" was just a step in a direction. I am still investigating memory and the family snapshot, my own as well as others. I plan on continuing this work in whatever direction it takes me.

Will this change the way people view family photographs?

This remains to be seen. It is dependent upon the individual. Viewers of the show could have gone back to there dwellings and re-examined their own family imagery. I have no idea. But I like to imagine that people will think about the relationship between memory and the photograph. I hope the installation of "re:collection" will come up in conversation and recalled to mind. Perhaps in the future another installation will come from the evolution of the work.

APPENDIX A

At one time a visual likeness or portrait was usually formal and reserved for those with money and status. Photographic portraiture and its inherently familiar poses owe much to the legacy of easel painting. From the 17th Century onwards, people have formally posed for their portrait. The idea of posing for a painting has a long sociological history. The history of portrait painting reflects a shift from formal to informal when comparing the time before Impressionism including the French Revolution. During the time before and after the French Revolution sitters were being painted formally with the appearance of nobility wearing the highest quality of clothing. Impressionist painter Van Gogh's informal portraits were part of the change to informal with a more casual setting outside using common people not of celebrity or money status. [1]

APPENDIX B

Kodachrome was the first color film created by Leopold Mannes and Leopold Godowsky, Jr (referred to as "man and God") and was introduced by the Eastman Kodak Company in 1936 on 35mm (1935 for 16mm). The introduction of Kodachrome transparency film made high-quality color photography suddenly accessible to everyone.[2] Kodachrome was the first high quality continuous tone color film and utilized chromogenic development. During the impoverished times of the Great Depression, the film was costly to most Americans and was technically limited to military use in World War II. Even though most people are familiar with the black and white images of the Farm Security Administration, photographers Jack Delano and Russell Lee were sent out in the field using the color film (specifically). Kodachrome sales have steadily declined since digital camera technology has been proliferating. The production of certain Kodachrome films started to be suspended beginning in 2002. According to Wikipedia, "On June 22, 2009 Eastman Kodak Co. announced the end of Kodachrome production, citing declining demand."[3]

1 Halle, David. The Family Photograph. *Art Journal,* Vol. 46, No.3, Portraits: The Limitations of Likeness (Autumn, 1987),. Pg. 219.
2 Rijper, Els. *Kodachrome: The American Invention of Our World 1939-1959*. New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2002. Pg 1.
3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kodachrome 2010.

During the 1930's and 1940's, economic decline, hardship and poverty began with the stock market crash of October 29, 1929 (known as Black Tuesday). From 1939-1945, World War II was being waged with husbands, fathers and brothers being sent to battle. At war's end, the United States produced roughly half of the world's industrial output. The years that followed World War II were prosperous ones in America. Kodak was releasing cameras that were extremely affordable and easy to use, propelled by the improvements of technology post war. Since it was affordable, more and more pictures were being taken in the 50's than anytime previous. "And as the power of photography in modern life became ever more apparent, amateurs began to see their snapshots not merely as a way of defining themselves, their families, and their customs and traditions, but as a vehicle to mold, even transform themselves." People took pictures of their belongings, family, and house and wanted to see things in color, which Eastman Kodak made possible. But not everything was happy in the 50's.

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